

\moral\minimax
 March 9, 1996, Saturday, Marin

(dream-thoughts)

Why would anyone "minimax loss"? Why not, just as well, "minimin" or "maximax gain"?

Game theorists' answer: because opponent may infer, or know (by "intelligence," penetration, SI) one's actual choice, beforehand.

But this leads to minimum outcome for oneself only when there is strict zero-sum payoff schedule. And this is virtually never the case. Nor would one ever know, for sure, whether it was the case.

Thus, see different values put by different players, and at different times and contexts, on "win, lose, draw" in chess. See the difference between a human player and a program; i.e., the latter's programmers, and in the resulting program. Bobby Fischer, who hated not to win, didn't much prefer draw to lose.

If there is uncertainty about the other's payoffs--as there always should be--then even the fear of having one's moves foreseen will not always lead to a focus on the worst-case outcome.

see file on \moral\wrong.

March 4, dream-thought: I'm telling a conference of CFR types that, for a new Cold War arms race and instability to return, it is not necessary that a madman or fascist like Zhirinovsky take power in Russia. All that was necessary was a military man in the mold of most of our Air Force generals, who would look at US capabilities from a worst-case point of view, who would not necessarily regard war as likely but one to be insured against. Instability would return.

How unlikely was this? Suppose likelihood was between 1% and 20%; or just 12%? That would be the likelihood of throwing heads three times in a row.

Suppose the stake was ending life in the Northern Hemisphere. How low would the likelihood of that have to be to be regarded as "negligible"? Well, "it isn't that low." And small changes upward are not insignificant.

We have dealt with a calculus for the last 50 years, especially the last 30, that if war was less likely than not, it

could be ignored. That was not appropriate. Nor were the measures taken to avert it been appropriate, either to the scale of the possible damage or to the time period in which the danger will persist. Not appropriate to a world in which, given current stockpiles of PU, aabout 1000 tons, 500 tons will exist 24,000 years from now, 250 tons 48,000 years from now: as much in 48,000 years as now exists in nuclear warheads of all the nuclear states.

50 years is 5% of a 1000 years; in 1000 years essentially all of our PU will still be around. 50,000 years: much longer than humans have existed, in present form. 50 years of no wars is 1/10 of 1% of that.

So, "worst nuclear case," which isn't even very unlikely, has hardly been considered at all (unless being struck first is regarded as much worse!)

In dream, I think of writing a "conversational" book that will communicate my feelings about this. But there will be no interest in it, another nuclear book. I think: This is a species with which I can't communicate, adquately. There is a mis-match. (See Ivan's fear of his testimony, his brain fever).

Thus, the risk of nuclear war could go up as easily as Yeltsin being replaced, as he will. That is the state of the world left to us by the policies of the best thinkers that we have (on government hire, or in the Establishment); nuclear capabilities with these dangers;

Put all the rationales together that were ever presented, and they don't add up to anything but the most reckless, feckless, irresponsible decision-making in human history. This is such an unfamiliar observation to readers of the NYT and Foreign Affairs that it can only sound like hyperbole, like rhetoric, as if I were commenting hyperbolically on a bad trade in a baseball league, or a bad play in a game.

What I'm really talking about is the kind of decision-making that led to World War I, or that led Hitler into Russia, though the latter came close r to being able to succeed, with proper tactics, less irresponsible to comply. What we have here is closer to the decision-making of Charles Manson.

For 50 years we concentrated on the thought that WWII did happen, and could conceivably happen again. We lost sight of the correct preoccupation of the Twenties: that WWI did happen, and could happen again. (this was Lynn Cherry's inference from my comments, reflecting Steven van Evera's concern with the Cult of the Offensive in WWI).

Was this a failure to consider worst possibilities? Or a

distorted calculation of what was the worst, and a preoccupation with this false notion?! (Moral: don't look only at what you consider the worst; but do look at the worst, and the "near-worst" too.)

And see the inability to learn from or respond to the evidence that initial calculations had been wrong. The inability to mobilize concern and will to stop the killing.